

The University of Chicago

THE DEVELOPMENT OF GEORGE
ELIOT'S ETHICAL AND
SOCIAL THEORIES

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
TO THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE
HUMANITIES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
AND LITERATURE

1934

By
BEN EUWEMA

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CHAPTER I

EMANCIPATION FROM CHRISTIAN DOGMA

There are two phases in the story of George Eliot's attitude towards Christianity, a negative and a positive phase. The story of the negative stage of the apostasy has often been recounted; but there is a later, a positive stage, which has not been so often discussed. After her first exuberant attempt to undo the work of her childhood training, after her first excited rationalism, there is a period of more tranquil and more balanced thought; it is then that she attempts her ambitious scheme of religious reconstruction. It is the purpose of this and the succeeding chapter to analyze the exact character of George Eliot's religious revolt, to indicate the manner in which her religious life was again given a more positive content, and to appraise briefly her indebtedness to her Christian inheritance.

With the early life of George Eliot we are not deeply concerned. It was the normal life of an impressionable, imaginative child, who was reared in the strictest formularies of orthodox Christianity. Unusually serious for her age, she yet exhibits nothing that is essentially unique. She learned her catechism, enjoyed prayer-meetings, read alarmingly weighty books, and was a serious and plodding student. She possessed at an early age, however, those qualities which were to condition her attitudes throughout life. Certain of these characteristics may be noted at once.

First, the youthful Mary Ann Evans was decidedly puritanical. Throughout her entire life, the most important category was for her the moral. Her puritanism seems to have been instinctive, intuitive. Hers was never an independent nature. She needed someone to symbolize Duty for her: unlike John Donne, her logic was deeply underlaid with affection. Just as Romola could not quite attain unto virtue without Savonarola's dramatic and personal appeal, so Mary Ann had an instinctive need for personal sympathy. And so, quite often in the crises of her life, there is a man somewhere at the background of her thinking: Hennell, Bray, Comte, Spencer, Lewes. She was temperamental to a degree: fits of the blackest despair alternated with moments (not so frequent) of the blithest gaiety. She needed coddling rather more than most people: it was only after Lewes, who had a genius for affability and domesticity, spoiled her outrageously that she was able to do her

best work. Cross summed up the whole matter in this way:

"In her moral development she showed, from the earliest years, the trait that was most marked in her through life -- namely, the absolute need of some one person who should be all in all to her. Very jealous in her affections, and easily moved to smiles or tears, she was of a nature capable of the keenest enjoyment and the keenest suffering She was affectionate, proud, and sensitive to the highest degree."¹

She was constitutionally disposed to pessimism. Seeing much good in individuals, she was nevertheless disposed to take a gloomy view of human nature in the large. For she was, in a true sense, realistic. Despite all the idealisms she espoused at various stages of her career, she saw the universe essentially as it is. The fact that she was unusually sensitive to suffering and to the nobility of aspiration should not blind the reader to her thoroughly British practicality.

Her realism was responsible for the first glimmerings of skepticism which she experienced. It was her ability to discern the disparity between the teachings of her elders and the realities of life which first led her to adopt an independent attitude towards the interpretations of religion with which she had become familiar.

There are three stages in the apostasy of George Eliot, each one of which represents a development farther away from her early piety and closer to her later and not inconsiderable rationalism. The first stage of her heterodoxy is dominated by Bray and Hennell; the second stage, by Strauss and Feuerbach; and the third stage eventuated as a result of her affiliation with the Westminster Review. The Brays and Hennells were purely local thinkers; Strauss and Feuerbach were internationally known; and the Westminster group represented a sort of eclectic liberalism.

We may detect, in the earliest period of her revolt, five important intellectual events:

1. A reading of Sir Walter Scott's novels showed George Eliot that it was possible to divorce theology and ethics. In fact, Leslie Stephen is authority for the statement that, when later in life, she was asked what had first unsettled her early dogmatism, she answered "Walter Scott."² It is rather startling, at first thought, to hear that Scott could have unsettled the faith of anyone; and yet a glance at his literary method will show clearly the possibility of such an effect. There is a certain re-

¹J. W. Cross (Ed.), George Eliot's Life as Related in her Letters and Journals. (London: W. Blackwood and Sons [1887?]), p. 8; for 1823.

²Leslie Stephen, George Eliot ("English Men of Letters"; London, 1926), p. 27.

ligious liberalism latent in the thought of Scott: his best characters, for instance, are not necessarily Christians, but may be men of any race -- Jews, Saracens, Turks. There was at least enough heterodoxy in Sir Walter Scott's novels to give Mary Ann Evans the idea that it is not a man's religion which gives him moral integrity.¹

2. Mrs. John Cash, in describing her memory of George Eliot's apostasy, finds Maria Edgeworth to be an important influence on the thought of her friend: "Now I well remember her speaking to me of Robert Hall's confession that he had been made unhappy for a week by the reading of Miss Edgeworth's *Tales*, in which useful, good, and pleasant lives are lived with no reference to religious hopes and fears; and her drawing my attention to the real greatness of mind and sincerity of faith which this candid confession betokened. Such remarks, I think, throw light upon the way in which her own evangelical belief had been affected by works in which its dogmas are not enforced as necessary springs of virtuous action."²

The novels of Maria Edgeworth must have had much the same effect upon the thinking of George Eliot as the novels of Scott. Benn says of the novels of Maria Edgeworth that in them ". . . the motive for rectitude is never self-interest; those who are proposed as objects of our imitation are actuated solely by such an unadulterated regard for the moral law as Kant himself may have prescribed; and the fatal results of allowing even the most amiable considerations to interfere with it are fully set out."³

3. In August of 1840, George Eliot noted the fact that she had read five numbers of Isaac Taylor's Ancient Christianity and the Oxford Tracts,⁴ which was then appearing serially. Opposing the new movement headed by John Henry Newman, Taylor attempted to show that the church fathers, to whom the Tractarians were everlastingly appealing for support, were very far from blamelessness of life or infallibility of doctrine. These articles of Taylor, however pious they may have been in intent, must have had an unsettling effect upon the mind of George Eliot. For once you are embarked upon a criticism of the church fathers, you are on the

¹For the literary influence of Scott upon George Eliot, cf. Emile Montegut, Ecrivains Modernes de l'Angleterre (Paris, 1885), p. 113.

²Cross, op.cit., p. 48; for 1841.

³A. W. Benn, The History of English Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century. (New York, 1906), Vol. I, p. 233.

⁴Cross, op.cit., p. 35.

high road to liberalism: if the very fathers of the Church are not wholly incorrupt, what then can you say for their less apostolic successors? It could not have been very far from Taylor to Hennell.

4. By 1840, George Eliot had become interested in the natural sciences. On June 23, 1840, she mentions her determination to read Mrs. Somerville's Connection of the Physical Sciences.¹

5. A wider and more significant intellectual influence came to George Eliot when she developed an acquaintance with the Sibree family at Coventry. Pfeiffer, in his study of George Eliot's indebtedness to German thought, summarizes the importance of this association:

"Ein Zeichen ihrer fortschrittlicheren Anschauungen ist schon, dass man den Sohn John 1842 nach Deutschland schickte, damit er in Halle studiere. Hier wurde er so sehr von Hegels Philosophie begeistert, dass er dessen Vorlesungen über die 'Philosophie der Geschichte' übersetzte und 1849 herausgab. Diese Übersetzung ist wohl die erste direkte Einführung Hegels in England, Aufsätze über ihn waren schon vorher erschienen. Von John Sibree scheint George Eliot ihre erste Kenntnis Hegels empfangen zu haben, er ist auch der einzige, mit dem sie brieflich über Hegel diskutierte."²

It is still a far cry from the position we know George Eliot to have occupied at this time to a complete disavowal of religious dogma. That disavowal was the direct result of her association, in her twenty-second year, with the Brays, and, in particular, of her admiration for Charles Bray and his brother-in-law, Charles Hennell.

Charles Bray (1811-84) was a Coventry ribbon manufacturer, noted for his advanced views and his philanthropy. His Autobiography tells of his youthful study, in London, of the Greek philosophers. He was self-taught. As a result of much pondering on metaphysical matters, he was converted to orthodoxy through the agency of an evangelical divine. Returned to Coventry, he again underwent a change of heart; this time, he was led away from evangelicism by the millennial teachings of George Combe, phrenologist and author of The Constitution of Man. In due process of time, he married a strictly reared young lady; during the honeymoon he set the bride to reading the French rationalists. Bewildered and vaguely uneasy at what she read, the young bride appealed to her brother, Charles Hennell, for reassurance. Charles, already a

¹Ibid., p. 34.

²Sibilla Pfeiffer, George Eliot's Beziehungen zu Deutschland (Heidelberg, 1925), p. 78.

Unitarian, carefully reconsidered the "evidences" of supernatural religion and came, in the end, to reject supernaturalism in all its forms. Thereupon the entire family came to espouse "advanced views" in matters of religion. The indirect result of Hennell's inquiry into the problems of religion was the publication, in 1838, of his An Inquiry into the Origin of Christianity. A year later, Bray brought out his Education of the Feelings, a bit of propaganda for Combe; and two years later, in 1841, he published his Philosophy of Necessity, which was an attempt to make social applications of Combe's philosophical theories.

Benn assures us that, "read in the light of modern criticism, Hennell chiefly impresses us by his extraordinary conservatism."¹ However little Hennell may impress Benn, to George Eliot his work must have represented a new point of departure. Briefly stated, what impressed George Eliot most profoundly was Hennell's ability to reconstruct the entire history recounted in the Old and New Testaments without recourse to the supernatural.² That the result of her first reading of Hennell was largely destructive of her faith is evidenced by the fact that she at once renounced the church and refused to attend the regular church services.

The influence of Bray was rather more positive in character. Greatly underestimated by most students of the thought of George Eliot, his ideas bear so close a resemblance to the most fundamental of George Eliot's moral beliefs as to make a more careful scrutiny into Bray's position imperative.

The fundamental doctrine of The Philosophy of Necessity is that ". . . a man could in no case have acted differently from the manner in which he did act, supposing the state of his mind, and the circumstances in which he was placed, to be the same"³ It is precisely this determinism, as we shall see later, which animates the actions of the characters in George Eliot's novels. Bray comes even closer to the position which George Eliot was to popularize later, when he says:

"The character of man is the result of the organization he received at birth, and all the various circumstances that have acted upon it since, and these, if that were possible, being given, a mental philosopher would predict the line of conduct that will invariably be pursued by each individual."⁴

¹A. W. Benn, English Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Longmans, Green, 1906), I, 394.

²George Eliot's analysis of the work in Cross, op.cit., pp. 60-64; for 1841.

³Charles Bray, The Philosophy of Necessity (London, 1841), I, 167 ff.

⁴Ibid., I, 175.

According to the system of Bray, a man's actions are determined by his character and his character is pre-determined by his past. The moral universe is a closely integrated whole: each breach of the moral law eventuates, according to the philosophy of necessity, in its consequences.

The highest type of life, Bray insists, the life which results in the greatest degree of satisfaction, is the life devoted to benevolence.¹ The benevolent man is not, as certain eighteenth century thinkers have supposed, governed by good passions; his benevolence is not instinctive, but calculated. "For," says Bray, "in the exercise of benevolence we may create more misery than we relieve, unless the intellectual faculties make a strict investigation and calculation with respect to the real tendencies of actions."²

From Carlyle, Bray learned the doctrine of Work, but he phrases it in the language of the Benthamites: "As we are obliged to consume, so the moral law imperatively requires that we should give an equivalent; if not, the world is exactly so much the poorer by what we have consumed."³ Bray's program of social reform is again like Carlyle's and Felix Holt's: "Let us begin, then, by assisting the working classes to assist themselves; let us make a beginning, show the way to a better state of things, and all the rest will follow."⁴

I should like to emphasize here the positive character of Bray's contribution to George Eliot's thought. The matter of exact influences and sources will be dealt with more formally later; it is important to realize here that George Eliot, as early as 1841, is already on the road to the reconstruction of religion. She has, it is true, disavowed her childhood faith; but she has also found a suggestion of what might possibly be used to replace her early dogmatisms.

As an earnest of her emancipation from the trammels of dogmatic Christianity, George Eliot imposed upon herself the onerous task of translating Strauss' Leben Jesu, a work which engaged her attention for two years and a quarter. Long before the date of publication, she had become heartily weary of Strauss' consistent negativism: on one occasion, she declares herself "Strauss-sick." However, her translation of Strauss was a logical step in her development as a theological liberal. And while she does not

¹Ibid., I, 279-81.

²Ibid., I, 281.

³Ibid., I, 285.

⁴Ibid., II, 490. Cf. "Felix Holt's Address to the Working-men."

unreservedly approve everything Strauss has to say, her general adherence to the principles of The Life of Jesus is considerable. "I am never pained," she wrote in September, 1845, "when I think Strauss right -- but in many cases I find him wrong, as every man must be in working out into detail an idea which has general truth, but is only one element in a perfect theory -- not a perfect theory in itself."¹

Fundamentally, The Life of Jesus is an application of Hegelianism to the vital basis of the Christian religion -- the character and the career of Jesus. Strauss set himself a two-fold task: to show that there is nothing supernatural in the career and personality of Jesus and to account for the persistent development of the Christ-idea. Philosophy and the natural sciences, he argued, have long since demonstrated the impossibility of miracles. The Gospels, filled as they are with the relations of miraculous occurrences, are the result either of deliberate falsification or of faulty observation and interpretation. For Strauss to accuse the evangelists of deliberate deceit (as Paulus had done) would run counter to the romantically sympathetic view of religious history which had become characteristic with the Hegelians. Nevertheless, the miracles cried out for an easily defensible, non-supernatural explanation; and Strauss found the hypothesis he needed in his famous "Myth-theory."

"A myth," in Strauss' language, is the embodiment of a general idea in an imagined story. That is to say, more concretely, that the personality of Jesus is the result of a dramatic and personal embodiment of the Messianic prophecies. The Gospels -- note well -- are not therefore to be regarded as untrue, even though the facts upon which the Gospels are based are demonstrably false: the Gospels may be false as fact, but they are true as myth. Let us look a little more closely at the criteria which Strauss established in order to test the factual or mythical character of the work of the evangelists. The schematism here is mine, but the quotations are from George Eliot's translation of The Life of Jesus:

A. The Gospels are historically invalid, --

1. "When the narrative is irreconcilable with the known and universal laws which govern the course of events."
2. When an account which pretends to historical accuracy is ". . . inconsistent with itself, [or] in contradiction with other accounts."

¹ Cross, op.cit., p. 79.

B. A narrative can positively be classed as unhistorical in these cases:

1. "The positive characters of legend and fiction are to be recognized sometimes in the form, sometimes in the substance of the narrative. If the form be poetical, if the actors converse in hymns, and in a more diffuse or elevated strain than might be expected from their training and situations, such discourses are not to be regarded as historical"
2. "If the contents of a narrative strikingly accords with certain ideas existing and prevailing within the circle from which the narrative proceeded, which ideas themselves seem to be the product of preconceived opinions rather than of practical experiences, it is more or less probable that such a narrative is of mythical origin."¹

The myth Strauss defines in various ways. "The historical mythus," which most concerns us, "has for its groundwork a definite individual fact which has been seized upon by religious enthusiasm, and turned around with mythical conceptions culled from the idea of Christ."²

Using these criteria as guides, Strauss proceeded to destroy the elaborate framework of supernaturalism which the evangelists had introduced into their narratives. No supernatural event of any consequence escaped the iconoclams of his elephantine scholarship. The destructive element in the book occupied him for 756 pages. His more positive program is contained in 27 pages.

The more positive aspect of Strauss' teaching represents an attempt to demonstrate the fact that, after the historical invalidity of the Gospels has been established, there yet remains a sense in which (spiritually) the Gospels are true. The critic, he says, ". . . . is filled with veneration for every religion and especially for the substance of the sublimest of all religions, the Christian, which he perceives to be identical with the deepest philosophical truth."³

To the modern reader, this final section of Strauss' work has all the air of an emaciated Hegelianism, of a realism stubbornly insisting upon a romantic coloration. To George Eliot the second phase of Strauss' work could not have been very impressive; for she says in a letter to Sara Hennell (March, 1846) that the last

¹D. F. Strauss, The Life of Jesus Critically Examined, trans. George Eliot (London, 1913), pp. 86-89.

²Ibid., pp. 86-87.

³Ibid., pp. 757-58.

hundred pages of the Life are ". . . . totally uninteresting considered as a matter for translation."¹

Robert Evans died on May 31, 1849; and Mary Ann Evans, feeling quite alone in the world, made a trip to Switzerland and the Continent. Two years later, in the spring of 1851, she associated herself with The Westminster Review.

The January, 1851 issue of the Westminster contains an article by George Eliot, a review of Mackay's Progress of the Intellect. Her review, as befitted a person who was later to become a member of Mackay's household, was entirely sympathetic. She approved the work mainly for four reasons:

1. The negative element in the work is admirable: ". . . . although the teaching of positive truth is the grand means of expelling error, the process will be very much quickened if the negative argument serve as its pioneer."

2. Mackay opposes institutionalism: "The endeavour to spread enlightened ideas is perpetually counteracted by these idola theatri, which have allied themselves on the one hand with men's better sentiments, and on the other with institutions in whose defense are arrayed the passions and the interests of dominant classes."

3. He makes much of the solidarity of the human race and of the fact that morality, in particular, is a level of experience in which the laws of causality are absolute: ". . . . the recognition of the presence of undeviating law in the material and moral world -- of that invariability of sequence which is acknowledged to be the basis of physical science, but which is still perversely ignored in our social organization, our ethics, and our religion."

4. Finally, she approves in Mackay's work his historical approach to the problem. Our religious ideas and experiences are the result of a long process of evolution; each age, each religion, each great religious genius has added to the sum total of human aspiration and illumination. It is, therefore, the duty of the present generation, not to rest content with the revelations of the past, but to press on to a newer and more complete revelation of the truth; for, ". . . . by a survey of the past, it can be shown how each age and each race has had a faith and a symbolism suited to its need and its stage of development, and that for succeeding ages to dream of retaining the forms of the past is futile"

The religious rationalism to which George Eliot had come when this review of Mackay appeared is essentially her mature point of view. It is necessary now to mention but one more influence -- that which came from Feuerbach as the result of her translation of his Wesen des Christentums.

¹Cross, op.cit., p. 83.

The Essence of Christianity was published in Chapman's Quarterly Series in July, 1854. At first, George Eliot had had an almost exclusively negative bias: she found that her early acceptance of revealed religion was erroneous. This stage of her career came to a crisis at the time of her study of Hennell and was re-inforced by her assiduous attention to the scholarly Strauss. Already in her study of Strauss she had come to the realization that something positive might still be reclaimed from the wreckage of christian theology: a kernel of truth might be discovered in the mass of untruth and half-truth. Feuerbach, however, went much farther than Strauss; in a sense, he went much farther even than Spinoza, whose Tractatus Theologico-Politicus George Eliot had translated. It is true, Spinoza had found a basis for the good life in goodness itself without recourse to the possible future rewards of goodness; but there was a certain coldness and austerity in Spinoza to which George Eliot seems to have taken exception. The orderly arrangement of his eternal syllogisms repelled the warm humanity of her mind; Spinoza was too much a dialectician and too little a champion of the oppressed.

Feuerbach, however, was different. He was more nearly the practical man of affairs: he was quite British. Like Spinoza, he made no pretense to a faith in immortality; in general, he was as far from orthodoxy as the Jewish metaphysician. But his point of view was different. No airy metaphysical speculations for him! His ethical theory was based upon an examination of the facts of human nature and upon an investigation into physical phenomena. And his investigations eventuated in no cold "intellectual love of God," but in a warm, altruistic ethics.

Like Strauss, Feuerbach faced the task of explaining the supernatural claims of religion and, as in the case of Strauss, too, his explanation cannot escape romanticism. The supernatural events chronicled in the Bible are not, he insists, deliberate falsifications of reality, but dramatic representations of the higher aspirations of mankind. The Resurrection, to take an example, while not of course strictly factual, is a bit of wishful thinking: man, desiring immortality or at least an indefinite prolongation of life, gives his wish a concrete and a dramatic expression. The Bible is a collection of works of art which express the conscious as well as the subconscious aspirations of humankind. The duty of men, therefore, is not to take these relations seriously, any more than the critic will take Macbeth seriously as an historical document; instead, the critic will attempt to read into the Gospel narratives the fundamentally human values which they portray. Much less is it the business of theologians to crystallize such stories into creed; it is for them to realize that the movement of human desire, as

expressed in these documents, is upward and to help along the immemorial aspirations of the race.

Feuerbach's skepticism of the traditional views of the Church is as thorough as Strauss'. "The Incarnation," he explains, "is nothing else than the practical, material manifestation of the human nature of God God became man out of mercy: thus he was in himself already a human God before he became an actual man." And then, a typical epigram: "God, says religion, made himself human that he might make man divine."¹

It is not, however, Feuerbach's break with traditionalism which primarily interests the student of George Eliot's thought. His positive teaching is of far greater importance. First of all, he would have us agree that Christianity is neither anthropomorphic nor theocentric: "the grand characteristic of religion, and of the christian religion especially, is that it is thoroughly anthropotheistic"; it "stresses the exclusive love of man for himself, the exclusive self-affirmation of the human nature."² That is to say, the aim of religion is man, not God; for the "personality of God is nothing else than the projected personality of man."³ And, again: ". . . man is the God of man. That he is, he has to thank Nature; that he is man, he has to thank man; spiritually as well as physically he can achieve nothing without his fellowman."⁴

All of which is to say that religion is essentially sociological: it is not primarily a science which has for its aim an understanding of the "mysteries of the faith"; it is rather to be considered a science which has for its aim the amelioration of human misery and the inculcation of altruism. Here, then, is a possible source of The Religion of Humanity outside the founder of that religion, Comte, himself.

The aim of theology is to foster the moral life; but it can never be the basis for morality; indeed, "whenever morality is based on theology the most immoral, unjust, infamous things can be justified"⁵ Religion without morality is unthinkable; but morality can do quite well without the sponsorship of religion. That this is the exact attitude of George Eliot is clear to anyone who will read her attack on Dr. Cumming. The very

¹Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, trans. George Eliot (Boston, 1881), pp. 50-51.

²Ibid., p. 46.

³Ibid., p. 226.

⁴Ibid., p. 83.

⁵Ibid., p. 274.

crux of her needlessly acid criticism is based on the fact that Cummings' theology is immoral, that he claims to be a christian without demonstrating the moral virtues of Christianity.

That the aim of morality is altruism needs no labored exposition here; for the readers of George Eliot are aware of the fundamental position this idea holds in her thought. Deakin, in her study of George Eliot's youth, says: "I think that Feuerbach, by making religion a human thing, made it lovable to her; he showed it as meeting man's needs because it grew out of them."¹

It was characteristic of a poetic strain in the mind of Feuerbach that he should make much of suffering. "The Christian religion is the religion of suffering. The images of the crucified one which we still meet with in all churches, represent not the Saviour, but only the crucified, the suffering Christ."² The highest expression of the divine in christianity is the story of the passion of Christ: "What does this mean in plain speech? Nothing else than this: to suffer for others is divine; he who suffers for others, who lays down his life for them, acts divinely, is a God to man."³ Here is another statement of the great Victorian faith in renunciation. It is this faith which informs the sacrifices of George Eliot's heroes and heroines.

The moral system of Feuerbach is quite readily deducible from this brief analysis of his position. Mankind is helped upward only by those who have the Social Good at heart. Develop, then, that Social Good! Stop longing after the unattainable; give credence to no such dreams as science has shown to be untenable; "let us concentrate ourselves on what is real." Every novel, every poem of George Eliot's is a re-affirmation of this morality.

Feuerbach's influence on George Eliot, then, was not inconsiderable. He provided George Eliot with a reasoned basis for that idealism which came instinctively to her mind: he rationalized her instinctive passion for Service. He represented for her an absolutely necessary step beyond the negativism of Strauss. Then, too, he reinforced her favorite stylistic mannerism, namely, the practice of employing biblical expressions for the purpose of expressing quite untraditional views. One example among hundreds will suffice:

"I have been thinking of that most beautiful passage in Luke's Gospel -- the appearance of Jesus to the disciples at

¹M. H. Deakin, The Early Life of George Eliot (Manchester, 1913), p. 83.

²Feuerbach, op.cit., p. 62.

³Ibid., p. 60.

Emmaus. How universal is its significance! The soul that has hopelessly followed its Jesus -- its impersonation of the highest and best -- all in despondency; its thoughts all refuted, its dreams all dissipated! Then comes another Jesus -- another, but the same -- the same highest and best, only chastened -- crucified instead of triumphant -- and the soul learns that this is the true way to conquest and glory. And then there is the burning of the heart, which assures that 'this was the Lord!' -- that this is the inspiration from above -- the true comforter that leads unto truth."¹

The importance of Feuerbach in the thinking of George Eliot resides in the fact that his work represents an attempt at a religious reconstruction. What is significant is Feuerbach's positive teaching: the light he throws on the psychological sources of religion, his appreciation of human effort and human dignity, his sympathy for the ages of faith, and his sympathy for those qualities which he called purely human.

Curiously enough, it was Comte who increased George Eliot's desire for a more positive religious attitude. His influence served to give the thought of George Eliot a further impetus in the direction in which it was already beginning habitually to move. The fact of George Eliot's indebtedness to Comte has been often pointed out and rather exhaustively treated. As a matter of fact, there is such an obvious similarity between the philosophy of the great positivist and the moral teachings of George Eliot's novels that most critics have been content to look no farther than to Comte for nearly all the important doctrines of the novelist. Let us be on our guard, however, against what Professor Morize calls "the fallacy of the unique source." Much of what is commonly called Comtian we have already discovered in the writings of Bray, Hennell, Mackay, and Feuerbach. Comte is an important source of George Eliot's moral thought, but he is by no means a unique source.

Auguste Comte, to mention but one of his many given names, was born at Montpellier in 1798, the son of devout Roman Catholic parents. In the Polytechnic School of Paris, which he attended between 1814 and 1816, he acquired a knowledge of the exact sciences and an enthusiasm for the techniques of science that was to be life-long. After leaving school, he continued the study of biology and history; to support himself, he tutored in mathematics. In the main, his life was devoted to writing and study.

Temperamentally, Comte belongs to that class of men whom William James would call "tough minded." You could hardly expect him to have much patience with idealism: the laborious dialectic

¹Cross, op.cit., p. 88.

of the idealists and their rather vaguely conceived Absolute had no appeal to the man in whom the empirical and scientific leaven had been working. His intellectual masters were Kant, who (Comte thought) had made metaphysics impossible, and the British empiricists, who had brought philosophy down to earth where common sense could have dealings with it. There was to be no metaphysical nonsense about Comte. He was to be un homme positif, or, as we would say, matter-of-fact, despising romance and sentiment, guided by the "realities" alone. He called his philosophy -- one dare not call it a metaphysics -- Positivism.

Noumena, Comte decided (after Kant) are unknowable; it is the business of philosophy, therefore, to concern itself purely with phenomena, since these alone are knowable. These phenomena -- what can we say about them?

"The first characteristic of the positive philosophy is that it regards all phenomena as subjected to invariable natural laws. Our business is, -- seeing how vain is any research into what are called Causes, whether first or final, -- to pursue an accurate discovery of these laws, with a view to reducing them to the smallest possible number Our real business is to analyze accurately the circumstances of phenomena, and to connect them by the natural relations of succession and resemblance."¹

Note here Comte's acceptance of the ultimate skepticism of Kant's Critique of the Pure Reason and his determination to set his faith solely on the realities discoverable by the exact sciences. Note, too, that (like Bray) he insists on the fact that all phenomena, including the phenomenon of morality, are subject to "invariable natural laws."

Positive knowledge, which is Comte's ideal, is the result of a long and arduous evolution. The human mind, he believes, has passed through three stages of thought; in fact, by a sort of recapitulation, many an individual passes through the same stages in his personal development. Harriet Martineau translates his "Law of Human Progress" in this way:

"The law is this: that each of our leading conceptions -- each branch of our knowledge -- passes successively through three different theoretical conditions: the theological, or fictitious; the metaphysical, or abstract; and the scientific, or positive Hence arise three philosophies each one of which excludes the others. The first is a necessary point of departure of the human understanding; and the third is a definitive state. The second is merely a stage of transition."

¹Harriet Martineau, The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte (London, 1893), I, 5.

Of the final stage, Comte says,

"In the final, the positive state, the mind has given over the vain search after Absolute notions, the destination of the universe, and the causes of phenomena, and applies itself to a study of their laws What is now understood when we speak of an explanation of facts is simply the establishment of a connection between single phenomena and some general facts, the number of which continually diminishes with the progress of science."¹

The theological stage reached its highest perfection when it achieved a faith in monotheism; metaphysics reached its highest development when it became monistic; just so, positivism will some day be able ". . . . to represent all phenomena as particular aspects of a single general fact; -- such as gravitation, for instance."²

Running parallel with this progress in the natural sciences, there must be (in order to render progress possible) a new society made along scientific principles. For the guidance of this new society Comte developed a new science which he called Sociology. "Now that the human mind has grasped celestial and terrestrial physics -- there remains one science, to fill up the series of sciences of observation -- Social physics. This is what men have now most need of." The French Revolution, Comte thought, was a sort of negative preparation for the new social order: it was to prepare men "for the advent of the positive philosophy, when it should have made its induction from social phenomena and ascertained their laws."³ The time for "the advent of the positive philosophy" was at hand and Comte believed himself to be the chosen prophet of social and intellectual development.

The positive philosophy, since it is based upon the study of phenomena and not, like metaphysics, upon an investigation into final causes, can never expect to arrive at absolute results or final formulations; since ". . . . the relative character of scientific conceptions is inseparable from the true ideas of natural laws."⁴ The laws of morality, likewise, since they are based upon an investigation into natural laws, are always to be considered tentative. For the fundamental principle of the new Social Physics is that "social phenomena are subject to natural laws, admitting of rational prevision."⁵ That is to say, within the narrow range of human conduct, morality is a matter of intellectual exer-

¹Ibid., I, 1-2.

²Ibid., I, 2.

³Ibid., II, 46.

⁴Ibid., II, 58.

⁵Ibid., II, 62.

cise. The good is that which the mind has come to recognize as beneficial to the race; the evil is that which experience affirms to be such. Ethics is, therefore, rationalistic, experimental provisional.¹

Fundamental to this conception of morality is an abiding and lively faith in the power of altruism (a word which Comte is said to have coined). Social living owes its existence not to self-interest, but to the social impulse. Instinctively, perhaps, men are selfish; but it is the duty of men to transmute their egoistic impulses into acts which can be of benefit to society in the large. In the perfect state, in which all men would be rationally altruistic, morality would take care of itself; however, in this evolving moral system in which we live, men must be given some motivation for high thinking and unselfish action. That basis Comte supplied when he gave the world his Religion of Humanity.

Some notion of the grandiloquence of Comte's dream may be gained from this passage, taken from the work of an English disciple:

"The Religion of Humanity stands on the same ground as the religion of Christ -- springs out of the same sources, works towards the same ends. It occupies the same ground, but not the same ground alone. Their bases do not coincide, although the base of the one covers the base of the other. The conception of Humanity covers a ground far wider than even the Catholic Church or any Gospel Church ever covered in the zenith of their power. For it covers the whole field of Science, of Economics, of Politics, of Art, even of daily intercourse. It covers the whole range of human happiness, power, well-being, and enjoyment of life. It does not crush out earth in order to win heaven, nor starve out life in the body for the sake of a life in Paradise."²

And the end of this religion is simply a state of general harmony, within and without, -- in the inmost spirit, between man and his fellows, between man and the Earth."³

This new religion will have its priesthood and a ritual closely modelled on that of the Catholic Church. While deprecating its medievalism, Comte admired Catholicism for its adaptation to the actual needs of the people. But, instead of worshipping God,

¹The reader will at once recognize the relation between this conception of morality and the ethics of George Eliot.

²Frederic Harrison, The Positive Evolution of Religion (New York, 1913), p. 2.

³Ibid., p. 235.

he would introduce the worship of man. In short,

"Positivism meets all the legitimate demands of the religious revival . . . by furnishing men's aspirations with a satisfying object, scientifically proved to exist as collective Humanity, and fitly typified under the consecrated image of the Virgin Mother and her Divine Child."¹

Huxley, viewing with amusement Comte's elaborate hierarchy and ritualism, was led to observe that the Religion of Humanity is Catholicism minus Christianity.

During the lifetime of Mill, there was in England a real, though not wide-spread acceptance of Comte's doctrines. The chief English positivists were recruited from a group of writers who had been friends at Oxford. While they were united upon the fundamental ideas of Comte, they were constantly quarreling as to the prominence that should be given to the inculcation of the Religion of Humanity. It was felt by some of the group that this rather fantastic affair was almost certainly predestined not to find favor in any society composed of hard-headed, empirical Englishmen.² Despite this disagreement, however, the group made much propaganda for the cause; its activity is shown by the presentation of a large number of lectures, attendance upon positivistic "chapels", and in translations and expositions of the works of Comte. None of these adaptations and translations was more useful than Harriet Martineau's condensed translation of the Philosophie Positive in 1853.³ Lewes' work on Comte's Philosophy of the Positive Sciences appeared in the same year.

So much for Comte himself. It would be an exceedingly simple thing, indeed, to find in the writings of George Eliot ideas which are in the closest sympathy with those of the French philosopher. There are not lacking passages such as this, in which George Eliot frankly stated her great indebtedness to Comte: "My gratitude increases continually for the illumination Comte has contributed to my life."⁴ And the fact that she read Comte very often and with much interest is no secret to the readers of Cross' Life. But there are other evidences which lead us to suppose that her admiration for Comte did not lead her to a wholesale adoption of

¹Benn, op.cit., I, 411.

²W. R. Sorley, A History of English Philosophy (New York, 1921), p. 256.

³By 1855 the work had achieved a modest success; Spencer notes the fact that he brought Comte twenty pounds that year as his share of the profits. Autobiography (New York, 1904), I, 577.

⁴Cross, op.cit., p. 407. Letter to Mrs. Congreve, January 16, 1867.

his doctrines. Cross tells us that in 1880 he read to her from the Discours Preliminaire; and he adds:

"For all Comte's writing she had a feeling of high admiration, intense interest, and very deep sympathy. I do not think I ever heard her speak of any writer with a more grateful sense of obligation for enlightenment But the appreciation was thoroughly selective, so far as I was able to judge. Parts of his teaching were accepted and other parts rejected."

Spencer, who undoubtedly knew George Eliot's thought better than Cross, informs us in his Autobiography that ". . . in respect to her avowed condition, she has been more of a disciple of Comte than of mine; although her acceptance of Comte's views was very much qualified, and, indeed, hardly constituted her a Comtist in the full sense of the word."¹

It is significant to note, in conclusion, that George Eliot (so far as the records show) made no enthusiastic references to Comte before 1859, although she had made his acquaintance by 1852. In 1859 George Eliot was forty years old; obviously much of her thinking on moral and philosophical matters had been done by that time. Miss Deakin finds two differences from Comte in George Eliot's thinking: first, unlike Comte, George Eliot found the moral progress of the race a very slow rather than a relatively swift process; and, second, George Eliot thought the Politique Positive, utopian.² In the complete picture of George Eliot's intellectual development, Comte occupies a not inconsiderable position; it must not, however, be assumed that he occupies the entire canvas.

¹Herbert Spencer, An Autobiography (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1904), II, 430; II, 237.

²Deakin, op.cit., pp. 168-69.

CHAPTER II

THE REMAINING INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY

It would seem in 1841 that George Eliot's apostasy was complete and final. And yet, it was not. George Eliot never renounced certain aspects of Christianity any more than did Feuerbach or Comte. Even while she revolted against Christianity on dogmatical grounds, she cherished the more tenderly its ethical and "poetical" qualities. She could deny the historical data upon which Christianity is founded; she could never renounce the emotional glamour which Christianity threw over life. She could renounce the dogmas of the church; she could never deny their symbolic significance. Like Strauss, she found the religion of her childhood to be false as fact, but true as myth.

It is the purpose of this chapter to show to what extent George Eliot's nature philosophy of life was influenced by her early religious faith. To be exact in one's discoveries and analyses is, in such a case as this, manifestly impossible. It will appear, however, that (far from completely denying the validity of all Christian ideals) George Eliot never quite shook off the points of view and the values of her girlhood. Her reconstruction of religion, to which reference was made in the first chapter, took the form of a revision and re-interpretation of Christianity, in scientific terms. What actually eventuated was a scientific restatement and re-evaluation of her girlhood faith.

It is impossible to determine the nature of George Eliot's reconstruction of Christianity without a careful investigation of her mature philosophy. Having discovered what are George Eliot's views of God, the world, and man, we shall be able to see more clearly and more readily the similarities and differences between the faith of her youth and the faith of her maturity.

A metaphysics, in the formal sense, George Eliot never developed. In the first place, she was not in any sense a systematic philosopher; and then, too, she agreed with Comte that metaphysics is only one step removed from theology in the progress of the race from barbarism to culture. Nevertheless, neither she nor Comte could wholly avoid certain metaphysical implications. It would have been utterly impossible for a person who wrote as much and as seriously as George Eliot did to avoid entirely any reference to the age-old problems of the philosophers: what is the nature of

God? what is the destiny of the race? what and why is evil?

"The idea of God," she tells us in her essay on Dr. Cumming, "is really moral in its influence"; that is to say, the idea of God is significant for man only when God is contemplated as sympathizing with the pure element of human feeling."¹ In a sense, this is a purely pragmatic view of deity: God is important for man only in so far as he aids him in the moral struggle. (It is characteristic of the thought of George Eliot that the moral struggle is always her first and most fundamental consideration.) She gives us her own interpretation of the function and character of God, negatively, when she characterizes Dr. Cumming's God:

"But Dr. Cumming's God is the very opposite of all this: he is a God who, instead of sharing and aiding our human sympathies, is directly in collision with them; who, instead of strengthening the bond between man and man, by encouraging the sense that they are both alike objects of his love and care, thrusts himself between them and forbids them to feel for each other"²

In a word, God, in George Eliot's consciousness, is the Captain of the Moral Struggle, or, to use a more familiar Victorian phrase, That Force Not Ourselves That Makes for Righteousness.

To express this idea in metaphysical language, God is the one great Principle that gives unity to the moral struggle and evaluates the moral good of a united humanity. In some mysteriously Platonic fashion, all the efforts put forth by individual men for righteous living unite in the person (or rather, the being) of God. It is on this God, whom Comte called Collective Humanity, that men must lean for support, sympathy, and strength. It is the ". . . . idea of a God who not only sympathizes with all we feel and endure for our fellowmen, but who will pour new life into our too languid love, and give firmness to our vacillating purpose." This God ". . . . is an extension or multiplication of the effects produced by human sympathy."³ In her novels and poems, George Eliot was able to trace the workings of this God with great particularity. The similarity between this view of God and the attitude of positivism must be fairly obvious. With all the rather clumsy wit that has become so characteristic of English idealists of the late nineteenth century, James Seth describes the course of the positivist's ethical enthusiasm in this way:

¹C. L. Lewes (ed.), George Eliot's Essays and Leaves from a Note-book (Edinburgh, 1885), p. 156.

²Ibid., pp. 156 ff.

³Ibid., p. 157.

"Comte and his followers would have us, in this day of the intellectual majority of the human race, dethrone the usurper gods of its theological and metaphysical minority, and place on the throne the true and only rightful God -- the Grand Etre of Humanity itself. In our weakness, we may cast ourselves upon its greater strength; in our foolishness, upon its deeper wisdom; in our sin and error upon its less erring righteousness. Nay, we can pray to this 'mighty mother' of our being; we are her children, and she is able to sustain us. Nor need we stop short of worship, for the Grand Etre is infinitely greater than we, and contains all our greatness in itself. And if we ask for a moral dynamic, for an energy of goodness which shall make the life good, otherwise so hard where shall we find such an abiding and abundant source of moral inspiration as in the enthusiasm of Humanity? Here is a motive force strong enough to carry us steadily forward in all good living, deep enough to touch the very springs of conduct, enduring enough to outlast all human strivings and activities."¹

The work of God, who must of necessity remain impersonal, is done in no superhuman or miraculous fashion. His work, as well as that of his human colleagues, is done under the very stringent necessity of subservience to law. Indeed, the most powerful element in the universe for George Eliot is not God at all, but the laws of causality. Operating in the lowest levels of the inanimate world, these laws bring about the regular recurrence of the seasons and regulate the orbits of the stars; operating with equal precision in the moral world, they bring inevitable consequences in the wake of every action, good or bad. It is the operation of these laws that leads Tito to ruin and makes Maggie's life one of frustration; it is the operation of these laws, and not the retributive actions of "a jealous God," that brings Dempster to a drunkard's grave. This principle of the moral self-sufficiency of the universe and the solidarity of the moral system George Eliot probably derived from Bray and Comte; and it is, beyond question, the most significant single contribution to the development of her thought.

The problem of evil, as might be expected, fascinated George Eliot tremendously. Every one of her many stories and poems concerns itself with the age-old question of the origins and nature of sin. She subscribed neither to the moral pessimism of Calvin nor to the romantic morality of Rousseau. Sin, she avers, arises from within; it is never to be conceived as something imposed from

¹A Study of Ethical Principles (New York, 1921), pp. 408-09.

without by a society or an environment. Men and women are born neither good nor bad, but with the potentialities of both virtue and evil. Man can be improved; whether he will or not is another question.

An example suggests itself in the life of Silas Marner. The first great evil in his life comes not from without, but from within. The treachery of his friend, the casting of lots, the loss of his betrothed -- these are not the primary causes of his sorrow. What is more fundamental is the shallowness of his own perceptions of his friend and his incomplete and jejune conception of religion. Had Silas been able to judge his friends intelligently and to understand the implications of his faith, his trouble would not have touched him as closely as it did, nor, in fact, could it have shattered his moral universe. Evil arises from a certain fundamental weakness in Silas' character; just as goodness, in the case of Deronda, arises out of his inherent perception of what is noble in thought and action.

From Bray and Comte, George Eliot had learned to look upon society as a marvelously integrated unity. What a given individual may choose to do or choose not to do will have a direct effect on the character of society at large. As Mr. Irwine says:

"There is no sort of wrong deed of which a man can bear the punishment alone; you can't isolate yourself and say that the evil which is in you shall not spread. Men's lives are as thoroughly blended together as the air they breathe; evil spreads as necessarily as disease."¹

The same idea is developed at some length in "Felix Holt's Address to the Workingmen": "We who are living now are sufferers by the wrong-doing of those who lived before us; we are sufferers by each other's wrong-doing; and the children who come after us will be sufferers from the same causes." The law of causality, then, is indeed operative in the moral realm.

George Eliot's treatment of the moral system invariably follows a pattern, quite in the Wordsworthian tradition:

"L'infiniment petit est roi du monde moral comme du monde physique, et c'est pour ne pas connaître ou pour ne pas porter attention comme elle le mérite à cette vérité que nous nous laissons pousser à l'abîme ou à la ruine. Nous tissons tous, jour par jour, notre destinée, et les fils de cette trame sont les mille riens insignifiants en apparence que nous n'avons pas pris soin d'écarter, une parole inutile, un geste méprisant qui a créé chez autrui l'antagonisme, une flatterie pardonnable

¹George Eliot, Adam Bede (London, Blackwood and Sons), Vol. II, chap. xii, p. 205.

qui a fait porter vers nous une sympathie dont nous ne pouvons pas profiter, une dissimulation innocente de la vérité par laquelle nous avons voulu nous protéger, moins que cela, une distraction, un silence."¹

The same laws are equally operative in the life of an individual and in the life of the race. The individual is influenced, first, by his heredity: the deposit of good or evil left by the entire racial past, as well as his own peculiar inheritance from his immediate ancestors. As a result of her studies in biology with Lewes, George Eliot came to see how intimately an individual's life may be connected with his ancestry. The very plot of The Spanish Gypsy revolves around that idea. Of Pablo, Roldan's violinist, we are told:

"The throb responsive to the finger's touch,
Was rarest skill that Pablo half had caught
From an old blind and wandering Catalan;
The other half was rather heritage
From treasure stored by generations past
In winding chambers of receptive sense."²

It is likewise true that the past actions of an individual determine his future. Not only is a man influenced by his heritage; he is also influenced by his own history. The fundamental error in the life of Tito, for instance, is that he once allowed himself to embark upon the perilous career of deception; for

" . . . our deeds are like children that are born to us;
they live and act apart from our will. Nay, children may be strangled, but deeds never; they have an indestructible life both in and out of our consciousness; and that dreadful vitality of deeds was pressing hard upon Tito"³

Much later, having continued upon his wicked career, Tito finds it utterly impossible to turn back; ". . . all the motives which might have made Tito shrink from the triple deceit that came before him as a tempting game, had all been slowly strangled in him by the successive falsities of his life."⁴

Here, then, albeit in a slightly unfamiliar guise, is the age-old problem of Freedom of the Will versus Determinism. The

¹Emile Montegut, "Ecrivains Moderne de l'Angleterre" (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie., 1885), I, 126.

²George Eliot, The Spanish Gypsy (London: Blackwood and Sons, 1868), p. 60.

³George Eliot, Romola (London, W. Blackwood), Vol. I, Chap. xvi, p. 156.

⁴Ibid., Vol. II, chap. xxxix, p. 88.

will of man is free, says George Eliot, for morality is possible and man is perfectible; it is equally true that the actions of men are determined, for the law of causation is inexorable. How can these two contradictories be harmonized?

First of all, it is necessary to re-assert the fact that George Eliot is no systematic philosopher. Whoever attempts, as I am doing, to impose a system upon her thought is, to some extent, guilty of misrepresentation. Primarily an artist, she was not too deeply concerned with nice distinctions and subtle relationships. Her view of life, like that of most artists, was intuitive rather than discursive. Such explanations as may be adduced here are, therefore, to be taken with rather more than a few grains of salt.

In George Eliot's mind, the problem seems to have assumed a psychological cast. She was not primarily concerned with the possibility of resolving a dualism in her thought; but her task, as she seems to have interpreted it, was to describe the moral struggles of actual men and women as she had conceived them. However, here as elsewhere, she occasionally trod the ground reserved for the metaphysicians and her thoughts on the subject have their metaphysical implications. Now, metaphysically, as we shall see, she was committed to the ideal of progress -- a progress that was to be effected by means of the operations of the laws of causation. Resident in the universe is the principle of the good, which may be called either God or the Absolute, depending upon the immediate context in which it is used. The Absolute tends in the direction of progress. But what can be said of this tendency? Is it correct to say that the movement of the Absolute is ipso facto inevitable or is more true to say that men have observed that the general tendency of the Absolute is in the direction of perfection? If the former is true, George Eliot is committed to a determinism: if the latter, to Freedom of the Will.

Another way of stating the problem is to ask, Is the Absolute good per se or is good per accidens? It seems to me that, in the case of George Eliot, only one answer is possible: the Absolute is good per se, the universe is, a priori, benevolent. If my answer is correct, and anyone who will recall the strictly teleological language of George Eliot's essays and poems can not doubt it, then we have here a faith in the inevitable progress of the universe towards the good. Metaphysically, George Eliot embraced the optimistic faith in a gradual evolution of the good principle and its slow extension into the categories of time and space. As she says, in "A Minor Prophet":

"The faith that life on earth is being shaped
To glorious ends, that order, justice, love,

Mean man's completeness, mean effect as sure
As roundness in a dew-drop -- that great faith
Is but the rushing and expanding stream
Of thought, of feeling, fed by all the past."¹

The direction of progress is charted, the dice are loaded in favor of the Good.

This is much the same idea as that developed by Spencer in his Data of Ethics. The not-yet-attained stage of completed evolution is the standard by means of which conduct is to be judged. In other words, the ideal striving to realize itself in the moral universe creates the possibility as well as the fact of moral progress.

Is this also a commitment to a moral determinism? In a fundamental sense, perhaps it is; but George Eliot thought differently. The tendency of each generation, or of each series of generations, must incline inexorably towards progress; but man, as an individual, may represent a retrogression. Progress is only determined, she seems to say, when you take the "long view." That, first of all. But let us look at an actual case. The individual is born into the world, as was Tito, with all the accumulated wisdom of the ages at his disposal. He may, by a careful study of history and by giving careful thought to his own experiences, come to know what is "the good and acceptable way of life"; for, in a sense, he is the sum of all the past; he "stands of the shoulders" of the past. He chooses, however, to disregard the warnings of experience and elects a life of evil. Romola, with surely no better ancestral and racial equipment, comes ultimately to espouse a life of virtue. Why is this so?

Inheritance plus Tito equals Evil; but

Inheritance plus Romola equals Virtue.

The difference in the results must come from the difference in personality. Exactly where?

Both Tito and Romola are subjected to temptation. Both of them hesitate: the evil course seems attractive to them both. Romola, however, is dissuaded from evil by her conscience; Tito is not. The same racial wisdom urges them both on; but Tito moves to the left and Romola to the right. Romola's soul searchings lead her to see the sublimity of renunciation; Tito's rationalizations lead him to see only the ease of a life devoted to self-indulgence. Both act as free moral agents; neither is subjected seemingly to an undue amount of extrinsic or intrinsic duress.

¹George Eliot, The Legend of Jubal and Other Poems
(London, W. Blackwood), pp. 192-3.

For George Eliot, obviously, the answer to the question is primarily descriptive. This is the way, she tells us, that men and women actually perform in the face of temptation; I have seen them, I know whereof I speak. The more fundamental problem she never approaches. Perhaps the question is unanswerable. At any rate, George Eliot seems to have asserted the freedom of the will, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, she seems to imply that, to speak theologically, Romola is of the elect and Tito is reprobate.

In George Eliot's case, as in the case of so many another, this is, I think, the truth of the matter: her first principles led her in the direction of a determinism, while her observation of actual men and women led her to stress freedom.

To the question, Why did Tito persist in evil and Romola in virtue? -- the answer is far less complex and far more definite. Each good decision strengthened Romola's moral fiber, and each evil decision weakened Tito's character:

" . . . in the first distinct colloquy with himself the ideas which had previously been scattered and interrupted had now concentrated themselves: the little rills of selfishness had united and made a channel, so that they could never again meet with the same resistance."¹

In this sense, then, man is the master of his own destiny. With these reservations, Montegut is correct when he says: ". . . elle a voulu mettre en évidence cette loi morale: nous sommes nous-mêmes les artisans de nos destinées et nous les faisons chaque jour sans nous en appercevoir, faute de surveillance sur nous mêmes. . . ." ²

But why should evil exist in the universe at all? To that question George Eliot, who was no oracle, gives us no very definite answer. What she might have answered to the question can, however, be surmised. In her highly idealistic moments, she may have seen in evil that principle which gives urgency to the moral struggle -- the principle which makes virtue actual and positive. She has suggested more than once, for instance, that only the constant and unremitting negation of the evil makes the good possible and progress an actuality.

In the case of Romola, to cite an example, the depraved status of Florence made possible her life of service. The great need of the poor Florentines drew her sympathies out to live a life of devotion to others. Savonarola is possible, too, only in

¹ George Eliot, Romola, Vol. I, chap. xi, p. 173.

² Montegut, op.cit., I, 111.

a situation in which his devotion is demanded.

In a more historical mood, she may have answered, as she has indeed often suggested, that evil is a remnant of the less perfect state of society and that, as mankind emerges from the brute and presses onward towards perfection, it yet retains this slowly-diminishing, vestigial encumbrance.¹

It is perhaps enough to realize that evil, in the novels and poems, is a tremendously vital reality. In the profoundest sense, every one of George Eliot's novels concerns itself with the problem of sin and how it is to be overcome. As far as George Eliot is concerned, the last word on the question was spoken by her most complacent mouthpiece, Daniel Deronda: "Within ourselves our evil will is momentous, and sooner or later it works its way outside us -- it may be in the self-aborrence that sings us into better striving."²

The issue of the long, world-old struggle between the Right and the Wrong is an eventual triumph of the Right. George Eliot does not, however, call herself an optimist, but a "meliorist."

A meliorist is neither an optimist nor a pessimist, but a person who holds a middle position between the two. Mankind, says the meliorist, can be improved and will be improved; but the process must, of necessity, be tedious, for the obstacles in the way of progress are formidable in the extreme. Of George Eliot it is perhaps not incorrect to say that, temperamentally, she was a pessimist, but that her intellectual exercises led her in the direction of optimism. Mankind will attain its millenium, but only after innumerable Maggie Tullivers have come to desperation and frustration.

Had George Eliot been reared in a liberal environment, it is quite possible that she might have become a thorough-going pessimist. But she had become accustomed from childhood to think of the universe as a stage upon which an epic drama was being enacted; a great war between the forces of Right and the powers of Wrong. She had become used, too, to the thought that the Right would emerge triumphant in the end. Such childhood bents of mind are not easily given over: Comte was right, for instance, when he insisted that, after the theological, must come the metaphysical stage of development. That is to say, after the mind has accustomed itself to think in theological terms, it cannot at once

¹Cf. Comte, Spencer, Mill, Huxley.

²George Eliot, Daniel Deronda (London: Blackwood and Sons), Vol. III, chap. lvii, p. 235.

achieve a perfect independence of ultimate considerations: the mind changes its vocabulary merely. In much the same way, a mind accustomed to deal with metaphysical generalities cannot at once give them up for the definite, clearly defined, sharply limited categories of science; instead, the mind is everlastingly toying with speculative matters quite outside the strict confines of scientific categories. And so, George Eliot, however much she might boast her freedom from theology and metaphysics, could not escape a dream of future blessedness, even when she denied that blessedness in the present or in the immediate future.

It is significant that, from whichever angle the student approaches the work of George Eliot, he is constantly thrown back to a consideration of her childhood training. Her theory of art is puritan; her vocabulary is puritan; her frame of mind (if such a tenuous matter can be discussed objectively) is puritan; and her happy picture of the remote future coupled with a most dismal view of the present is perhaps more characteristically puritan than any other aspect of her mental make-up.

George Eliot may be looked upon as a Christian pessimist. Almost like the puritans, her view of a blessed future is confined to another world; if she does not call it heaven, at least it is as far away. As far as the present is concerned, life is quite unsatisfactory.

So far, we have investigated George Eliot's attitude towards God, and those natural laws which govern the course of events. It is necessary now to look more closely at her ethical ideals. What was her conception of man and "the whole duty of man"? What is the way of life which leads, if not to happiness, at least to the greatest degree of satisfaction? It is not until we have answered these questions that we shall be able to see the relationship which exists between the George Eliot of Coventry and the George Eliot of London, Europe, and the world.

Morality, in the thought of George Eliot, is always a personal and rarely a social phenomenon. Social reform interested her hardly at all, except in so far as it reflected the lives of individuals. Mankind she divided into two classes, the elect and the non-elect. It is the elect who are responsible for whatever progress mankind may make; it is they who, walking in semi-darkness and urged on only by their love of the race, will lead mankind to its ultimate and rather mysterious fate.

The Calvinistic doctrine of total depravity George Eliot would naturally reject; in fact, she assures us that even her worst characters are not without certain atoms of virtue. But normally, men and women are not virtuous enough to live "the higher life" unless they undergo a process which the Christian calls

conversion. This process inevitably involves self-abnegation and some sort of renunciation. This romantic morality, obviously taught by Carlyle and the novels of Dickens, can be detected in every one of her novels, stories, and narrative poems.

The process of conversion may be exemplified by reference to a short-story which appeared in 1857, called "Janet's Repentance." George Eliot sent the story to Blackwood who, feeling that everything was not quite as it ought to be and that there was something "doubtful about the treatment of clerical matters," entered into some correspondence with Lewes in an attempt to reassure himself.¹ The story, however, appeared later in the year, just as George Eliot had written it. An examination of the story will convince the reader that Blackwood's scruples were not without foundation; for the piety of the piece is of rather an unconventional sort. Briefly, the story is this. Janet Dempster is married to a drunkard, who most cruelly uses her. She is neither better nor worse than she ought to be -- a pleasant, meek, but unconverted wife, given somewhat to the sin of wine-bibbing. In a fit of drunken rage, Dempster sends his wife into the streets in the dead of night. Horribly disgraced, Janet seeks refuge with a neighbour who is a member of a nonconformist sect. The neighbour, recognizing that Janet's need is spiritual, calls in her pastor, a Mr. Tryan. The clergyman comes, recognizes Janet's need of conversion, and, instead of preaching to her, tactfully tells her of his own moral lapses. His sympathy quickly wins Janet to a realization of the shallowness of her former life. She resolves to live for others and, inspired by the friendship of Tryan, actually keeps her resolution. This, then, constitutes her conversion.

There is no doubt in the reader's mind that this conversion is effected through no supernatural means. It is not even effected by Tryan in his capacity as a churchman: the fact that Tryan is a clergyman makes no appreciable difference in the story. The means of her conversion is no supernatural grace, but the warm human sympathy of a fellow sinner. As Lewes had truthfully written to Blackwood: this story was to be "illustrative of the life of our country clergy . . . solely in its human, and not at all in its theological aspects."²

¹J. W. Cross (Ed.), George Eliot's Life as Related in her Letters and Journals (London: W. Blackwood and Sons [1887?]), pp. 223 ff.; for June, 1857.

²Ibid., p. 206; for November 6, 1856.

Nowhere, perhaps, is George Eliot more outspokenly rationalistic than in her interpretation of conversion. Nowhere is she more careful to avoid even the suggestion of supernatural intervention. The process involves two essential factors, both of them purely natural in origin and in reference: a realization of the wretchedness of a life devoted to selfish ends and, second, a renunciation of the life of sin and a determination to live for the welfare of others. In any situation involving a moral problem, the answer must always come after a severe and an honest intellectual effort. Let us examine a few instances of these moral crises.

In the Epilogue to Romola, the heroine gives us a horrible example of what conversion is not:

"There was a man of whom I was very fond, so that I could a great deal of his life, who made almost everyone, fond of him, for he was young, and clever, and beautiful, and his manners were all gentle and kind. I believe, when I first knew him, he never thought of doing anything cruel or base. But because he tried to slip away from everything that was unpleasant, and cared for nothing else so much as his own safety, he came at last to commit some of the basest deeds -- such as make men infamous. He denied his father, and left him to misery; he betrayed every trust that was reposed in him, that he might keep himself safe and get rich and prosperous. Yet calamity overtook him."¹

Romola's own case is in direct contrast to that. Reared in a selfish pagan home, used to every self-indulgence, she is unprepared for the trials which are sure to come. Her husband proving unworthy, she determines to leave him. On the way out from Florence, she meets Savonarola, who is little more than the voice of her own conscience made audible: "You are seeking your own will, my daughter. You are seeking some good other than the law you are bound to obey. . . . man cannot choose his duties."² Returning to Florence, she becomes converted when she realizes how selfish her life has been and how needy are the Florentines.

One more example will suffice. Esther, the heroine of Felix Holt, is the frivolous daughter of an earnest clergyman. Apparently, she is perfectly content to spend her life in despising her father's eccentric friends and doctrines and in reading Byron. Through her companionship with Felix, however, she comes

¹George Eliot, Romola, II, 446.

²Ibid., Vol. II, chap. xl, p. 105.

to a more profound conception of the needs of mankind:

"Esther had been so long used to hear the formulas of her father's belief, without feeling or understanding them, that they lost all power to touch her. The first religious experience of her life -- the first self-questioning, the first voluntary subjection, the first longings to acquire the strength of greater motives and obey the more strenuous rule -- had come to her through Felix Holt."¹

And the method Felix employed was to shame her into a realization of the pettiness of her life and sympathies.

Once converted, it is the aim of the regenerate soul to devote itself to the welfare of others. Realizing that she had lived selfishly and not with the broad interests of society in mind, Janet Dempster (after her husband's timely end) spent the remainder of her life in "ministering," first to Tryan, and, after his death, to others. Romola, realizing that the larger interests of mankind could best be served by her return to Florence, did so; she became the nurse to all Italy. And so one might go on to call the roll of all the major, heroic figures in the novels and poems of George Eliot. This devotion to others, which all the converted characters share, is not, as might be supposed, an earnest of their happiness; but it is the one way in which even a measure of happiness is attainable. George Eliot, who seems to have tasted little genuine pleasure in her own life, gives little of joy to her characters, even to the noblest of them. Most of her great characters are sorrow's children.

The life of the converted person exhibits certain very definite characteristics. The first of these is, of course, altruism; since the altruistic impulse is so intimately bound up with the whole process of conversion, since it is the desire for unselfish living which first makes conversion effective. Altruism manifests itself in several characteristic fashions, each one of which is effectively bound up with all the others. First of all, in tolerance.

George Eliot was very proud of her toleration of other creeds, particularly of the Christian religion. In a letter to Sara Hennell, dated February 24, 1857, she wrote:

"I am the more inclined to think that I shall like your book, because you are suspected of having given undue preponderance to the Christian argument: for I have a growing conviction that we may measure true moral and intellectual culture by the comprehension and veneration given to all

¹George Eliot, Felix Holt (London, W. Blackwood and Sons), Vol. II, chap. xxvii, p. 45.

forms of thought and feeling which have influenced large masses of mankind. . . ."¹

And to Harriet Beecher Stowe she wrote on July 11, 1869, after having read Old Town Folks: "I think your way of presenting the religious convictions, which are not your own except by indirect fellowship, is a triumph of insight and true reverence."²

The reasons for her sympathy with a creed which she had long since thrown over as being untrue, are suggested in this passage from "Janet's Repentance": "Our subtlest analysis of schools and sects must miss the essential truth, unless it be lit up by the love that sees in all forms of human thought and work, the life and death struggles of separate human beings."³

Her reasons are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, she was committed to take a sympathetic view of Christianity; for, at however low a level, religion of any sort represents a necessary and inevitable stage in the evolution of mankind from barbarism to altruism. In the second place, toleration was psychologically necessary to her. We have noted that, from her earliest years, the "faculty" of reverence was very highly developed in her personality; so highly developed, in fact, that, even after her negation of Christian metaphysics, she nevertheless maintained the Christian moralities and sympathies. "What pitiable people those are," she says, "who feel no poetry in Christianity!"⁴

Those ideas find a continuous exposition in the novels. That Christianity represents a necessary historical stage in the development of human society finds expression in such passages as this: Adam Bede ". . . had the blood of the peasant in him as well as the artisan, and a peasant can no more help believing in a traditional superstition than a horse can help trembling when he sees a camel."⁵ Of Mr. Irwine, the genial pastor of Adam Bede, she says quite frankly:

"If he had been in the habit of speaking theoretically, he would, perhaps, have said that the only healthy form religion

¹Cross, op.cit., p. 213.

²Ibid., p. 449.

³George Eliot, Scenes of Clerical Life (London, Blackwood and Sons), II, 166.

⁴Cross, op.cit., p. 355; for December 26, 1862.

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George Eliot, Adam Bede, Vol. I, chap. iv, p. 70.

could take in such minds was that of certain dim but strong emotions, suffusing themselves as a hallowing influence over family affections and neighbourly duties. He thought the custom of baptism more important than its doctrine."¹

George Eliot's general position in this matter is quite in line with the conventional attitudes of the positivists:

"A mind in the positive stage of faith feels the orthodox conception of religion to be jejune, artificial, as well as visionary. But it does not feel any direct antagonism toward it. It seeks to include, clarify, and give stamina to these vague and beautiful aspirations; to place these eternal sentiments of piety, veneration, and self-sacrifice on a rational and solid footing. It does not doubt their supreme beauty, their innate affinity with human nature, and their paramount power over human life. It looks not for the death, but for a resurrection of the religious spirit that it may endow it with a new realm."²

Theoretically, George Eliot was bound to accept a sympathetic attitude towards Christianity. Psychologically, too, she could not escape retaining at least some of the overtones of her earlier faith. After Daniel Deronda has been told of the fact that he is a Jew, he answers in words that may have been his author's own: "The Christian sympathies in which my mind was reared can never die out of me."³ In fact, so complete is George Eliot's adherence to the ethics of Christianity, that from the beginning of her career as a writer of fiction, she was constantly mistaken for an orthodox Christian.

The flower of her life devoted to altruism is renunciation of self. The source of all our woes, so George Eliot thought, is self-gratification. No forgiveness, no repentance, can screen us from the results of selfish action. Once a man embarks upon a selfish career, he is on the highway to moral suicide. Once, however, he decides to model his life after the principle of renunciation, he is on the high road to moral salvation. Maggie Tulliver, in discussing the way of life with Stephen, phrases George Eliot's thought in this way:

"We can't choose happiness either for ourselves or for another: we can't tell where that will lie. We can only choose whether

¹ Ibid., Vol. I, chap. v, p. 99.

² Frederic Harrison, The Positive Evolution of Religion (New York: Putnam's, 1913), p. 4.

³ George Eliot, Daniel Deronda, Vol. II, chap. liii, p. 177.

we will indulge ourselves in the present moment, or whether we will renounce that, for the sake of obeying the divine voice within us -- for the sake of being true to all the motives that sanctify our lives. I know this belief is hard: it has slipped away from me again and again; but I have felt that if I let it go forever, I should have no light through the darkness of this life."¹

The model character, from the standpoint of his renunciation is Daniel Deronda. Rather than win honors for himself in school, he helped his room-mate Meyrick to do so; rather than accept a life of ease and self-indulgence from the hands of his gentile foster-father, he throws in his lot with a despised race. In this respect, however, Deronda differs only in degree from all the other characters in the novels who are predestined to lives of nobility.

The process of renunciation has been neatly plotted in the novels and poems. First of all, there is given a character who, although he may be living a life of ease, has within him the potentialities for unusual service to society: a lively imagination, keen sympathies, an incipient idealism. A crisis [in his life] induced either by a phase of his thought or by external circumstances, leads him to feel dissatisfaction with his former life. Then follows a period, long or short, of intense concentration on the meaning of life and its tendencies. Since we have a hero to start with, the dice are loaded; sooner or later, he decides upon an amendment of life. The larger good, he feels, requires that he sacrifice his personal ambitions and that he devote himself to the service of the race. He learns to say, not always as melodramatically as Fedalma:

"Father, I choose! I will not take a heaven
Haunted by shrieks of far-off misery."²

And then,

"Slowly she moved to choose sublimer pain;
Yearning, yet shrinking; wrought upon by awe,
Her own brief life seeming a little isle
Remote through visions of a wider world. . . ."³

This renunciation of self carries with it a divine approbation; it conduces, as it were, to "the glory of God." It is

¹George Eliot, The Mill on the Floss (London, Blackwood and Sons), Vol. II, Bk. VI, chap. xiv, p. 332.

²George Eliot, The Spanish Gypsy, p. 161.

³Ibid., p. 292.

hardly necessary to add here that by divinity George Eliot would mean the social good personified as Collective Humanity. Romola, for instance, felt that approbation:

"As Romola walked, often in weariness among the sick, the hungry, and the murmuring, she felt it good to be inspired by something more than her pity -- by the belief in a heroism struggling for sublime ends, towards which the daily action of her piety could only tend feebly."¹

This approbation, needless to say, has at its basis no supernatural grace; it is purely human in its sanctions. Of Mrs. Raynor we read in "Janet's Repentance":

"Mrs. Raynor had her faith and her spiritual comforts, though she was not in the least evangelical, and knew nothing of doctrinal zeal. I fear most of Mr. Tryan's hearers would have considered her destitute of saving knowledge, and I am quite sure she had no clearly defined views on justification. Nevertheless, she read her Bible a great deal, and thought she found divine lessons there -- how to bear the cross meekly, and be merciful. Let us hope there is a saving ignorance, and that Mrs. Raynor was justified without knowing how."²

In Romola emphasizing the human quality of conversion and faith, George Eliot thus describes a dark moment in the life of her heroine:

"In those times, as now, there were human beings who never saw angels or heard perfectly clear messages. Such truth as came to them was brought confusedly in the voices and deeds of men not at all like the seraphs of unfailing wing and piercing vision. . . . The helping hands stretched out to them were the hands of men who stumbled and often saw dimly, so that these beings unvisited by angels had no other choice than to grasp that stumbling guidance along the path of reliance and action which is the path of life"³

The basis for altruism is human. Let us help one another, George Eliot seems to say, first of all because it is our duty. The universe is so constructed that genuine human progress results only from mutual helpfulness. Why "mutual aid" should be so cardinal a principle in the development of the race, George Eliot has not revealed; but it is so, and this fact constitutes

¹George Eliot, Romola, Vol. II, chap. lli, p. 229.

²George Eliot, Scenes of Clerical Life, II, 113.

³George Eliot, Romola, Vol. II, chap. xxxvi, p. 54.

for her (as for Spencer) a Great Imperative. Let us help one another, she adds, because essentially this is a sad world; let us huddle together like frightened children. so that, even though we cannot rejoice together, we may at least suffer together. Mr. Jerome, one of the minor worthies in "Janet's Repentance," gives expression to this attitude: "Whatever recommends itself to me, Thomas Jerome, as piety and goodness, shall have my love and honour. Ah, friends, this pleasant world is a sad one, isn't it? Let us help one another, let us help one another!"¹ This same idea can be found in a letter written to the Brays (January, 1853): "Heaven help us! said the old religion; the new one, from its very lack of that faith, will teach us all the more to help one another."² The teaching of her novels, she insists in a letter to Lady Ponsonby (December 10, 1874) is precisely this same truth. "My books," she writes,

"have for their main bearing a conclusion . . . namely, that the fellowship between man and man which has been the principle of development, social and moral, is not dependent on conceptions of what is not man: and that the idea of God, so far as it has been a high spiritual influence, is the ideal of a goodness entirely human."³

There is a purely selfish reason, too, for the altruistic life: happiness is impossible unless you are unselfish. Maggie Tulliver felt the truth of this, immediately after her study of Thomas a Kempis:

"It flashed through her like the suddenly apprehended solution of a problem, that all the miseries of her young life had come from fixing her heart on her own pleasure, as if that were the central necessity of the universe; and for the first time she saw the possibility of shifting the position from which she looked at the gratification of her own desires -- of taking her stand out of herself, and looking at her own life as an insignificant part of a divinely guided whole."⁴

The punishment of a life devoted to evil is annihilation, non-Being; the reward of a good life is "immortality." That is to say, only that can be immortal which can be of use to the race in its epic quest of perfection. There is, of course, a perfectly consistent metaphysic at the basis of such a view. The Good, or

¹George Eliot, Scenes of Clerical Life, II, 137.

²Cross, op.cit., p. 157.

³Ibid., p. 532.

⁴George Eliot, The Mill on the Floss, Vol. II, Bk. IV, chap. iiii, p. 35.

the Absolute, or God, moves inexorably, not indeed without many a backward glance, towards perfection. Now, in order to make perfection possible of achievement, the Good must forever negate the evil. That is to say, the universe can be made good only if the evil in it is continuously being sloughed off. Damnation, then, in George Eliot's mind, consists of the unequivocal annihilation of the evil; Salvation, on the other hand, implies a glad affirmation of the good. This process is, of course, true only when you take "the long view." In an ultimate sense, George Eliot reverses the dictum of Shakespere:

"The evil that men do, lives after them;

The good is oft interred with their bones."

Of necessity, such an unequivocal affirmation of the good and negation of the evil precludes the very idea of personal immortality. No man is good enough to be entirely acceptable to God: no man is so utterly evil an individual as to be entirely rejected. The Absolute is selective. Whatever of evil an individual may have committed, however profoundly it may affect his immediate environment, will in the long range of the evolutionary process be negated and pass into non-Being. Whatever good an individual may have accomplished remains as an honoured inheritance for the future.

George Eliot promises all virtuous men and women that immortality sanctioned by the Religion of Humanity: the dead live on "in minds made better by their presence." Of Moses she says:

"He has no tomb.

He dwells not with you dead, but lives as law."¹

Adam Bede is promised a similar immortality:

"Their lives have no discernible echo beyond the neighbourhood where they dwelt, but you are almost sure to find there some good piece of road, some building, some application of mineral produce, some improvement in farming practice, some reform in parish abuses, with which their names are associated by one or two generations after them."²

The last paragraph of "Janet's Repentance" speaks thus of Mr. Tryan's immortality: "But there is another memorial of Edgar Tryan, which bears a fuller record: it is Janet Dempster, rescued from self-despair, strengthened with divine hopes, and now looking back on years of purity and helpful labour"

And, finally, this article of her faith finds its

¹George Eliot, "The Death of Moses," The Legend of Jubal and Other Poems, p. 289.

²George Eliot, Adam Bede, Vol. I, chap. xix, p. 321.

completest expression in the poem, "O, may I join the choir invisible":

"O may I join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence: live
In pulses stirred to generosity,
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
For miserable aims that end with self,
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,
And with their mild persistence urge man's search
To vaster issues.

So to live is heaven:
To make undying music in the world"

* * *

We have traced in some detail the development of George Eliot's thought and have noted how far she has come from the orthodoxy of her girlhood. However, the aim of this chapter is not to show how far George Eliot moved away from the attitudes of her school-days; but rather to show that, despite the fact that she came to reject supernatural religion "in all its forms," she nevertheless could not escape its moral and spiritual colorations. The reader will already have noted many similarities between her later philosophy of life and her earlier faith; I shall, however, attempt to summarize what happened in the thinking of George Eliot by means of a chart. The major divisions in the outline represent the classical loci of Calvinistic theology. Although George Eliot "never formally joined . . . any other communion than the Church of England,"¹ she had evangelical leanings. Cross mentions Miss Lewis, "an ardent evangelical Churchwoman," who "exerted a strong influence on her young pupil Mary Ann Evans whom she found very sympathetically inclined."² Although it is strictly incorrect to speak of Mary Ann Evans as a Calvinist, the term is sufficiently accurate for purposes of comparison.

The similarities between classical Calvinism and George Eliot's mature philosophy will at first blush, appear to be very striking. Reflection will, however, convince the careful reader that a most thorough intellectual revolution is here represented. It is significant to note that, in each case, the dogmas of Calvinism, represented in the left column, are symbolically re-interpreted in the right column. Bear in mind the statement of

¹Cross, op.cit., p. 13; for 1832.

²Ibid., p. 12.

Strauss: The gospels are "false as fact, but true as myth."

CALVINISM

THE MATURE GEORGE ELIOT

Theology

God is absolute, the arbitrary and uncaused ruler of the universe. He is known vaguely by his works, more precisely through his revelation in the Bible.

God is personal.

God is finite, the leader in the moral struggle. He is to be known empirically, in the sympathetic help one person gives another.

God is an impersonal force.

Cosmology

The world lies in sin. It is, however, ruled by Providence. Miracles are possible and, during certain stages of the world's history, were frequent. Even now, prayer may seriously condition the course of natural events.

The universe is governed by a series of immutable natural laws. The Cause-Effect series can never be broken. Miracles are unthinkable. Prayer does not affect the course of events in any objective fashion.

Anthropology

Man is totally depraved; he is unable to achieve salvation through his own efforts. Only the elect can achieve virtue; the great mass of men are reprobate.

Man is not naturally good: he is natively unaware of his debt to society, -- selfish. Only a few achieve awareness of the need for altruism and only these are capable of "the higher life." The great mass of men are thoughtlessly indifferent to the demands of altruism.

Soteriology

The elect are saved through the operation of divine, "efficacious" grace. They are made conscious by the Holy Spirit of their need for holiness.

The good are made altruistic when they realize the need of humanity. Their eyes are opened to their selfishness and they are intellectually and emotionally led to see the sublimity of lives devoted to service.

Christology

Salvation is possible only through the vicarious atonement of the God-man.

This saviour is the historical Jesus.

The sacrifice of Jesus is an unique, historical event.

Complete self-realization is possible only through sacrifice and renunciation. This sacrifice is personal, not vicarious. Jesus is the "type" of suffering humanity, as well as the great example of renunciation. Self-sacrifice is a continuous process, in the lives of all those who live "the higher life."

Ecclesiology

The Church, the mystical "body of Christ," exists in order to make the good life possible.

The virtuous need to help one another, in order to make the good life an actuality.

Ethics

The good life is the result of divine grace (only the elect can be really good). The elect are desirous of living virtuously in order to achieve holiness and in order to show gratitude for their salvation.

The life of evil is the consequence of non-election and the resulting absence of grace.

The good life is the result of an intellectual awareness on the part of the virtuous of the fact that altruism is necessary in order that the ends of society be achieved.

The life of selfishness is the result of a lack of awareness of the needs of society.

Eschatology

There is a future life, in which personality survives. The life of evil is punished eternally in hell. Evil, then, eternally exists. The elect inherit heaven.

There is no such thing as personal immortality. The evil passes slowly into non-Being, oblivion.

The altruistic live on "in deeds of daring rectitude."

